FBI Redacts Letter About Drone Usage That Was Already Published In Full By Sen. Rand Paul

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from the *redaction-by-random-number-generator* dept

The government's overclassification problem has turned its redaction efforts into a farce. When not deploying questionable exceptions to avoid returning responsive documents to FOIA requests, government agencies are cranking out amateurishly redacted pages that leave info exposed in one response and covered up in the next. No wonder they fear the "mosaic" approachto FOIA requests. If they'd just come up with some meaningful redaction guidelines, they could avoid this. Instead, things like the following bit of stupidity happen.

> When outgoing director Robert Mueller told the Senate Judiciary Committee last July that the FBI was in the "initial stages" of developing guidelines for its drone program, a handful of privacy hawks in Congress perked up and requested more details. The FBI released correspondence with three members of Congress—Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY), Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) and Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX)—in its latest bundle. Paul had already posted in full the FBI's answers to questions about the scope and purpose of domestic UAV surveillance, but FBI FOIA officers still saw fit to sanitize them.

Here are the two versions of the same document, with the legislator's clean copy up top and the needlessly redacted version sent to Muckrock below it.

The FBI can't even keep track of what it's already sent out in unredacted form, making a mockery of its own paranoiac "but for criminals/terrorism" tendencies. What makes this even more ridiculous is that the inverse happened just a couple of weeks ago, when Tom Coburn called out the DHS for producing drone documents to Congress that were more heavily redacted than the ones it supplied in response to an EFF FOIA request (which were also rather heavily redacted).

> For 2010 alone, my staff has tallied at least 20 instances in which the publicly-released documents appear to contain legible passages which are redacted entirely or in large part from the documents DHS provided the Committee. In other words, DHS appears to have chosen to withhold information from Congress which the DOJ — and, we must assume, DHS — has determined was appropriate to share with the American public.

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